

May 11, 2020

Dear House Judiciary Committee Members,

On May 6, 2020, I watched the House Judiciary Committee hearing for HB5679. I was very encouraged by Representative LaGrands's comments at the end of that hearing regarding the inclusion of individuals on the Michigan Sex Offender Registry who posed no threat to public safety or were at risk of recidivism. As an example, he mentioned persons who were convicted of Criminal Sexual Conduct – 4th degree, a misdemeanor. I strongly endorse his comments and encourage the House Judiciary Committee members, as well as all members of the House and Senate to carefully consider whether the Michigan SOR should include such a wide range of offenders. Representative LaGrand's comments spoke directly to the situation my son has been living under since he accepted a plea bargain offer of Criminal Sexual Conduct – 4th degree, tier 1 in 2017 in Ottawa County.

Our son, Tim, was a student at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, MI, when he sustained a traumatic brain injury in a car/train accident in December 2007. The effects of the TBI were memory impairment, diminished organizational abilities, deficits with attention and concentration, and rapid cycling bipolar condition. These problems resulted in him having to leave his work in ministry and eventually began causing stress in his marriage.

After several years of unsuccessful medications and treatment from psychologists and psychiatrists, Tim began in-patient treatment at Hope Network, a brain injury rehabilitation clinic in Grand Rapids. He lived at home with his wife and children on the weekends and at Hope Network during the week. Our family could see that his wife was becoming more distant and disenchanted with the prospect of being married to a person with a TBI. Eventually she filed a complaint against him with the Ottawa County Sheriff's Department for touching her in a sexual manner during one of his weekends at home. The complaint was filed over a week after the alleged incident was supposed to have occurred. Because of the deficits from his brain injury, Tim was very concerned about his ability to defend himself in a trial, not to mention the risk of incarceration. Therefore, he felt compelled to plead "no contest" to a plea offer of Criminal Sexual Conduct – 4th degree, tier1 (misdemeanor) to avoid a trial and the threat of incarceration. This required him to become a registrant on the Michigan Sex Offender Registry.

Because he is now a registered sex offender, due to the "school safe zones," he has been denied the opportunity to move to a Hope Network facility in Kalamazoo, lost employment opportunities in the Grand Rapids area, and been restricted from attending his children's school functions, although he is neither a threat to public safety nor a concern to re-offend.

Because of his experience as well as that of others who we have come to know personally, we urge you to encourage and support meaningful reform to the SORA in

Michigan to eliminate “school safe zones,” and to evaluate registrants to determine whether it is even appropriate for them to be on the Sex Offender Registry if they are not a threat or danger to the public.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter,

David and Kristine Mejeur